Industry PROFILE

An integrated approach to nurturing industry development and NWT wealth

Arts and Crafts

The Arts industry is integral to the economic, social and cultural fabric of the Northwest Territories. The production of NWT arts and fine crafts is primarily a cottage-based industry. This sector is extremely diverse and includes sub-sectors such as performing, literary and visual arts, publishing and film and video production. This profile will focus on goods produced by artists in the sector commonly known as arts and fine crafts.

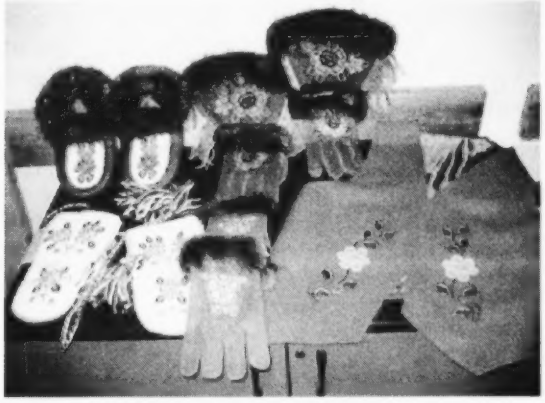
THE ARTS AND CRAFTS INDUSTRY TODAY

In 2002 a survey indicated that approximately 5,400 people produced some form of art or fine craft on a regular basis across the NWT. The industry is evolving, with both traditional and modern activities forming the fabric of this cultural and economic enterprise. It is important to draw a distinction between traditional NWT art and fine crafts and modern or emerging arts-related activities. By traditional, we refer to the established community-based arts, where teachings and practices of the production have been handed down from one generation to the next, and a high degree of recognition exists among consumers and the general public.

Traditional knowledge is an integral component of aboriginal art; passing down the knowledge and skills required to master these traditional arts helps preserve cultural heritage.

The products themselves reflect the diversity of cultures within the NWT and are generally associated in some way with the traditional lifestyles of northern aboriginals. Products generally make use of indigenous materials and have their origin in some kind of utility or trade enterprise.

These products vary from birchbark baskets, porcupine quillwork, caribou and moosehair tufting to many variations and forms of beadwork. These traditional products are gaining wider recognition, as are Northern sculptures, paintings, prints and tapestries.



Marie-Adele Wetrade, Gameti, NWT
Traditional sewing / Moose Hide / Beadwork
(RWED, GNWT)

The production of traditional aboriginal art and fine crafts generally provide a supplementary income to thousands of Northerners. Only a few Northern artists have achieved a high degree of public recognition and perhaps worldwide acclaim, thereby realizing sufficient demand for their art and subsequently a primary means of income. The industry also provides a subsistence wage to many other individuals who are just learning, and those who may lack the resources they need to promote themselves.

In contrast to the traditional arts and fine crafts industry, emerging arts-related activities include the modern performing and literary arts, festivals, multimedia and film. Still in their infancy, these activities are becoming more established in the NWT. The North is home to many active recording artists and playwrights who incorporate traditional knowledge and culture in their works. They have also coupled creative concepts based on traditional motifs with a modern industry which differs in terms of its structure, production values, distribution and marketing systems when compared with those features normally associated with the traditional arts and fine crafts sector.

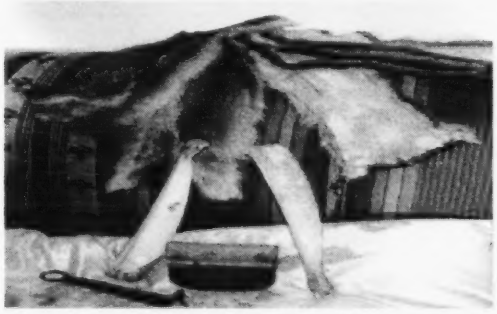
The modern or emerging arts industry has typically received less public and private sector support in the NWT because participation in this sector is more recent and less widespread than in the traditional arts and fine crafts sector. Another attribute of the modern emerging arts industry is that it is less reliant on the traditional economy, although it may call on this heritage for its inspiration.

There is, in some segments of the modern industry, a reliance on electronic media to produce or market new work and marketing practices are generally more sophisticated compared with traditional artists. It is equally true that the kinds of support that artists in these emerging fields may need are different from those who are engaged in the arts and fine crafts industry.

Traditional arts and fine crafts production is primarily a cottage-based industry. Individuals create products independently, often out of their homes. Products are sold either to local cooperatives or other retailers, or to one of the wholesalers dealing in northern art. Due to the widespread and small-scale nature of the industry, accurate statistics on sales are difficult to determine.

The arts and fine crafts industry in the NWT can also be classified into two major sectors based on origin: one which derives from indigenous aboriginal traditions and skills, and one based on ideas and techniques imported from non-aboriginal cultures. Of course, these two sectors blend at the intersection of individual interpretation and artistic evolution, and in the incorporation of new methods of production and marketing. For instance, the Internet offers a very modern means of marketing for individual artists, opening large markets for people who were previously only selling to limited local markets.

Today's NWT arts and fine crafts industry is quite diverse, and is characterized by a wide range of traditional and modern activities. Within the segmented sub-sectors there is enormous opportunity and potential for development and growth.



Traditional tools used to tan hides and produce traditional fine crafts. (RWED, GNWT)

CURRENT NWT TRENDS

As noted, about 5,400 adults are involved on a regular basis in the arts and fine crafts industry. For most participants, their participation generates additional income that supplements a primary income derived from other sources.

The gross output of arts and fine crafts distributed through established wholesale channels was about $10.7 million in 1999. Estimates of the total economic value of the modern and emerging NWT arts and fine crafts sector are not available at this time.

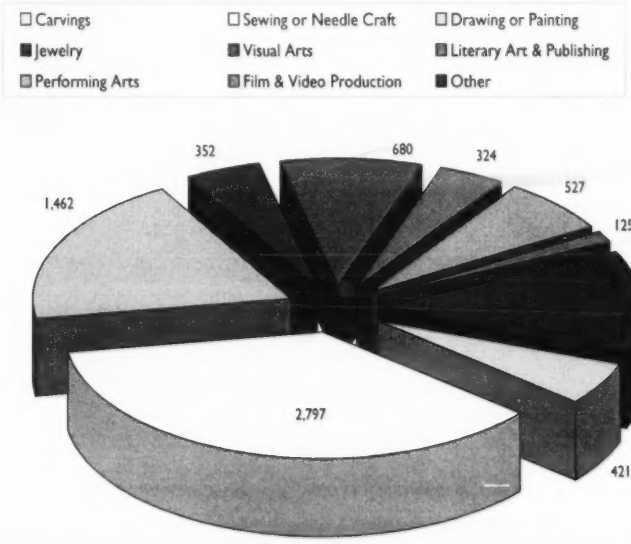
The role and type of government support has changed over the years. In the early 1950s, as the aboriginal population began its transition from living on the land to living in settlements, arts and fine crafts were first seen as a means of generating employment income and improving economic circumstances. During the 1960s and 1970s, first the federal government and later the territorial government put considerable effort into promoting the production of fur products, carvings, prints, tapestries, tufting and quillwork. This was followed by vigorous, opportunity-driven, efforts to position NWT art in the international marketplace. To some extent these efforts have been successful. The raising of awareness of Inuit art in particular has been successful. However with the division of the NWT into two separate and distinct territories, the NWT has been struggling to create a separate identity for their arts and fine crafts, distinct from that of Nunavut artists.

Support for art festivals in the NWT represents an investment in public infrastructure of a different kind. There is recognition that start-up costs, organization and promotion of festivals require significant public support for the first few years until self-sufficiency can be achieved. The festivals help to stimulate enthusiasm among producers and the public and provide short-term stimulation of local economies.

Two Government of the Northwest Territories departments, Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development (RWED) and Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) have shared interests in supporting the arts. Broadly speaking, ECE supports the creative aspects of the arts and fine crafts, while RWED's primary role is in supporting the business aspect.

In early 2002 an Arts Strategy Advisory Panel (the Panel) was established to facilitate the development of an NWT Arts Strategy. This was a cooperative undertaking between RWED and ECE and the arts

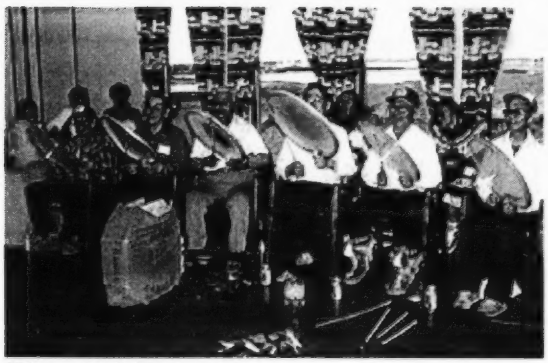
Chart 1: Varieties of Arts and Fine Crafts in the NWT.
Number of artisans engaged in each activity



communities throughout the NWT. The panel's mandate was to identify needs, current opportunities and gaps in support of the creative arts and cultural industries. The panel, made up of representatives from the private and public sector including non-government organizations from across the Territories, held public consultation meetings in all regions of the NWT. The panel reported a vital need for continued support and growth in the arts industry in the NWT. The GNWT made a commitment to develop an Arts Strategy and continues to support a diversified economy, especially one that supports activities in more remote communities where employment options are limited.

As the traditional industry has matured in the NWT, private retailers have taken on an important role in the marketing of arts and fine crafts. Major retailing operations are professionally operated and act as a critical go-between for community artists and craftspeople that might otherwise have great difficulty getting their product to the marketplace. There are several well-established retailers across the north networking to integrate wholesaling with retailing opportunities.

A healthy and thriving arts sector in the NWT will provide meaningful employment to residents in communities that would otherwise have limited opportunities to participate in the wage economy.



Tuktoyaktuk Drummers
(RWED, GNWT)

Ft. Liard Birchbark Basket
(RWED, GNWT)

GLOBAL AND NATIONAL TRENDS

Globalization is becoming a major force in the arts industry. Art and fine crafts products from the NWT and elsewhere in the world are more readily available in a greater range of retail stores and publicized in non-commercial exhibits and galleries. This has increased competition, as even in the most remote parts of Canada it is now possible to purchase South American or Asian art and crafts. While globalization of the industry represents a challenge, such as meeting supply and demand, it offers new and exciting opportunities for moving more NWT art into foreign markets.

NWT art and fine crafts are becoming more readily accessible through new forms of marketing media. In recent years catalogue production and distribution have increased significantly. There has also been an increased use of the Internet, which increases the potential to reach millions of households around the world. The growth of art and fine crafts distributors on the Internet has increased substantially. New markets are more readily accessible for the sales of art and fine crafts through E-commerce solutions. Venues such as Ebay.com and Yahoo online storefronts offer people in smaller remote northern communities who currently have reasonable access to the internet the opportunity to compete on the global market from the comforts of their own homes.

The potential for sales and awareness of Northern-produced products greatly increases as more NWT artists make use of the internet's advanced technology.

This type of access presents other opportunities in the design of multimedia vehicles for a variety of purposes. As the Internet continues to grow, so will the opportunities for artists with the need to develop home pages or Internet web pages. As the capabilities of the Internet include sound and other forms of multimedia, the demand for products and services will shift into new artistic and design areas. For example, there will be a growing demand for NWT multimedia educational products, especially as they relate to traditional languages, skills and knowledge. Such materials can also be made readily available on CD and will require a host of artistic skills to design the covers, menu systems, backgrounds, as well as provide spoken and musical sound tracks.

Labour intensive traditional tanning
(RWED, GNWT)

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

Art is an important contribution to our economy; as an export industry and cultural identifier, art brings financial support to many artists who rely on their talents and artistic design to maintain their way of life and spiritual connections to the land. Success for many artists is important to their livelihood and mental well-being.

Fostering the growth and development of the arts industry through holistic approaches that come from community-driven participation will help to ensure the success and sustainability of art in the NWT.

RESOURCES

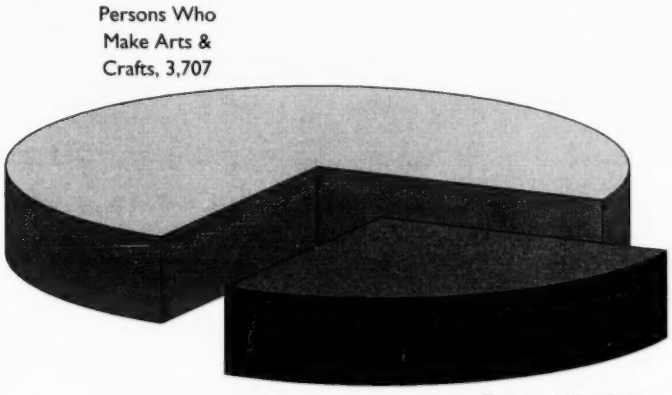
Above the treeline, traditional artists and fine craft producers still use raw materials such as whale, ivory and sealskin, though these products have restricted access to some international markets. Other materials used include fur, hide, bone from muskox, fox, seal, caribou, and stone.

Dene and Metis living below the treeline collect porcupine quills, fish scales, and moose and caribou hair. They use fur, hide and bone from beaver, rabbit, moose and caribou as well as birch bark, spruce tree roots, antler and horn.

A recurring issue for many traditional crafters is the availability of raw materials and supplies such as access to sufficient quantities of quality traditional tanned moose and caribou hides. Traditional tanning is extremely labor intensive. In most cases, production is restricted by seasons. Although there are a number of individuals in all regions in the NWT who have the knowledge to traditionally tan hides, these individuals generally produce traditional hides for their own use and are rarely motivated to produce hides to meet the demand of other traditional crafters.

For the modern, emerging arts there is a need to identify the extent and the scope of market demand. Training in the use of computers and software is required. New marketing techniques need to be pioneered. This is a field where a significant amount of research needs to be done to determine the kinds of training programs appropriate for further industry development. The art and fine crafts industry would benefit from a stronger infusion of business skills. Too often artists, out of necessity, are forced to be their own financial advisors and administrators. This is rarely successful. A preferred arrangement is to provide artists with the business support they need to ensure their enterprise brings them the returns they seek.

Chart 2: Making and Selling Arts and Crafts in the NWT.
5,046 artisans are involved with the industry



HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Both the traditional and the emerging forms of art and fine crafts demand a high level of skills and talent. For traditional art and fine crafts, the knowledge and skills are fading from NWT communities, as the younger generation is not as attracted to this industry.

For the younger generation wanting to become involved in this area, acquiring the necessary skills is becoming more difficult. With a new Arts Strategy to guide government program development, there is renewed optimism that new educational programs will be developed to incorporate the integration of traditional knowledge and skills to foster the artistic development of future generations.

Additional support should be focused on assisting producers to expand their knowledge about consumer demand and the types of products for which a market exists, as well as providing training that improves the marketability of products.

Once artists have a good understanding about the kinds of things that consumers want, they need the technical and artistic skills needed to fulfill their vision. At the same time, education is required to encourage consumers to appreciate art and fine craft work from Canada's NWT.

More training effort needs to be made by introducing individual artists to new concepts and techniques. Programs such as mentorship training could prove to be very informative and beneficial by encouraging the exchange of information between established Artists and novices.

This approach would also be a way to introduce new techniques that stimulate creativity and experimentation. This will encourage more production, stimulate interaction between community members and provide opportunities for artists across the Territories to network together. There is a need to improve traditional and contemporary skills development and enhanced training programs and services in the NWT.

Facilities provide significant employment opportunities in communities

Dene FurClouds produces knit fur accessories using traditional skills and cultural inspiration. (RWED, GNWT)

Acho Dene Native Crafts Ltd. primary product is birchbark baskets (RWED, GNWT)

Lack of availability of raw materials and supplies is only one barrier faced by many fine craft producers. There is a need to create and develop programs that preserve traditional skills and activities. This will increase and stimulate production, and motivate many fine crafters and other traditional harvesters to produce various raw materials, such as traditionally tanned caribou and moosehides that are required to produce products. The environment in which artists create their work often stimulates their artistic creation. In many cases, their communities and the land have significant spiritual meaning and are the centre of their creativity and vision.

Training/ Product Production needed by the arts industry falls into five areas of development:

- Arts programming in schools and secondary level education training in the arts;
- Youth mentorship programs within communities;
- Support for acquiring raw materials and supplies;
- Creation of production facilities and equipment to support product production, and
- Training in small business development and individual product marketing.

For both marketing and skills training, two approaches have proven beneficial:

- Workshops that involve artists or fine crafters from outside the NWT introducing new concepts and techniques, and
- Programs such as mentorship training to encourage the exchange of information between artists and novices, the learning of new techniques to stimulate creativity and experimentation.

Elsie Klengenberg' "Going Down River" (RWED, GNWT)

CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT

Investment requirements in the traditional arts and fine crafts sector fall into several categories:

1) education and training,

2) research and development,

3) access to affordable raw materials and supplies, and

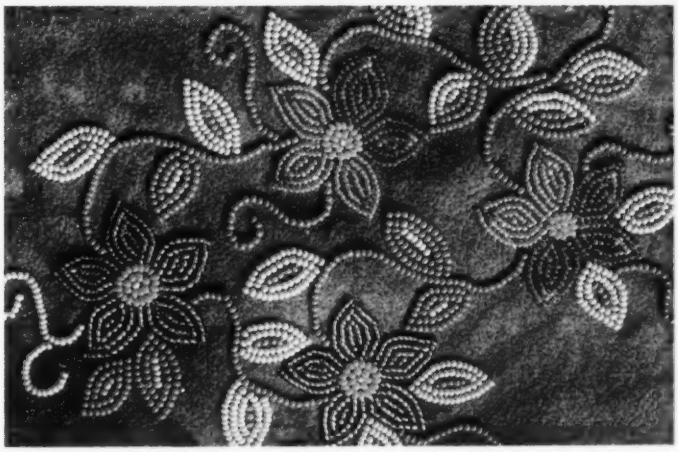
4) marketing and promotion.

The requirement in any of these areas varies by region and product type. For a great many art and fine crafts producers who operate out of their home, there is not a significant requirement for large-scale capital investment, outside of tools and equipment and improved access to a better range of inexpensive raw materials. In many communities investment in the areas of flexible programming such as one that would allow for equipment purchase for new projects, would be very beneficial. This would allow for the maintaining of traditional skills and an increase in art and fine crafts production.

At all levels of production there is a need for designing marketable products and determining the most suitable production methods and approaches, i.e. cottage industry style, community workspace, or large production facility. As with more developed products, investment in training to develop the necessary skills and strategic marketing of products is required.

While still evolving, there has been a significant investment to date in retailing art and fine crafts by various galleries, retail outlets and northern member co-operatives. In addition, approximately 65 businesses are listed in the NWT Business Directory as being involved in art sales. There are galleries in most major centers that specialize in northern art and fine crafts.

The diversity and the number of activities that comprise the industry means that investment must be carefully considered. Certainly in the traditional art and fine crafts sector, investment has historically brought moderate incremental economic benefit. The multiplier benefits that exist in some industries are not always present in the art and fine crafts industry. It is equally true that in some cases the value of investments has not been well documented. In the case of festivals, for example, economic models have not yet been satisfactorily created to determine the multiplier effect on local economies. Also, the lack of definition in the industry, as well as the use of informal marketing practices, means that public or private expenditure models are difficult to develop. There are many places where investment could be made, but there is a lack of information about the benefits of this spending.



Dene Beadwork (RWED, GNWT)

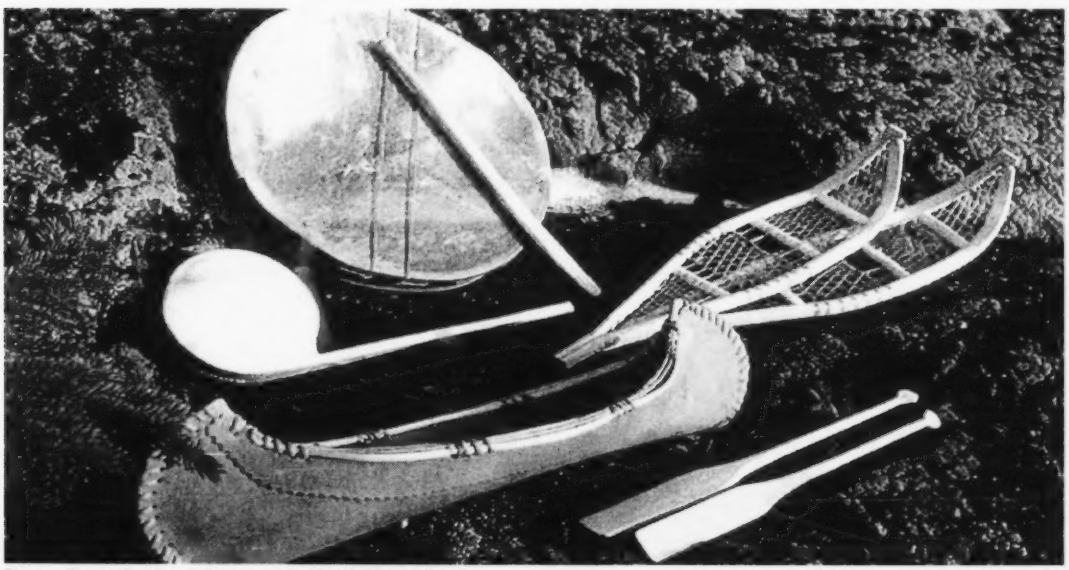
PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Although it would not involve a physical presence, an arts foundation would provide an organizational infrastructure that should result in greater exposure and focus on the arts and fine crafts sector in the NWT. The Arts Strategy Advisory Panel identified the need to assess the feasibility of an NWT Arts Foundation. Foundations have been known to act as a catalyst for further refining of an industry, however success of an Arts Foundation in the NWT would require community engagement to ensure long-term sustainability.

Production facilities across the NWT produce products ranging from furs, traditional beaded moosehide and birch bark baskets. These facilities create employement directly and indirectly through art and fine crafts purchases in communities.

For the modern industry, in the past few years, businesses have started to invest in new infrastructure. There are now several sound recording facilities in the NWT and access to communications and computer services has improved. Some communities now have access to high-speed Internet capabilities and broadband services, which aids in providing access to global marketing.

In support of the use of the Internet, the transmission of digital images and to promote marketing opportunities, the Federal Government has made a major commitment to "wiring" every community into the "information highway". While this investment is not especially directed toward the arts industry, there will be some obvious applications and benefits for it.



Dene Fine Crafts "Minitures" (RWED/GNWT)

MARKETS AND SALES

Traditional art and fine crafts products vary widely, with products ranging from fine art worth many thousands of dollars to fine craft items selling for considerably less. Overall, the traditional arts and fine crafts industry is characterized by a duality of formal and informal distribution channels. On the one hand, there is a fairly well developed wholesaler distribution network that links northern artists to galleries and retail outlets in the south. On the other hand, many producers sell directly to consumers, completely bypassing the more formal distribution channels.

The informal nature of the activity makes it difficult to measure total size of the industry and impact on the economy. Similarly, limited information is available on market sales and trends. The only means of acquiring this type of information is by surveying producers and retailers, and a client group such as tourists.

From previous surveys, we know that in 2002 about 5,400 people in the NWT were engaged in some form of art and fine crafts production. While this survey also provides an indication of incomes earned from the sale of art and fine crafts, we have little knowledge about domestic and family use. The information that has been collected effectively shows somewhat varying results.

Although traditional products are popular in the United States, Europe, and other markets, the vast majority of products are sold in Canada. According to a 1999 wholesaler survey, more than half of all sales are made in three provinces:

1) Ontario (22%),

2) Quebec (19%), and

3) British Columbia (18%).

In the international market, the United States shows the greatest potential for expanding the art and fine crafts market. A survey of dealers showed a strong tourist demand for art and fine crafts. From surveys of tourists, we know that a good selection of locally available fine craft products can vastly add to visitor satisfaction. As tourism continues to grow, there will be an increased demand for NWT art and fine crafts products. Visual art, especially prints and soapstone sculptures are particularly attractive products.

There have been various efforts to market NWT cultural products within the modern arts industry. For example, in the film sector the NWT has established an NWT Film Commission Office. The role of the NWT Film Commission is to provide:

- Location scouting assistance, including augmentation of location research; and
- Liaison and networking services within the industry

High Arctic Soapstone (RWED, GNWT)

The Film Commission is also responsible for attracting film production companies to the NWT. During shooting, film companies tend to draw on local services such as caterers, hotels, and transportation services. Additionally, there is considerable local hiring for movie extras, costume making, local guides and logistical support, to name a few.

PRODUCT MARKETING

On a Territorial scale, product marketing requires significant attention. Greater understanding, awareness and appreciation of NWT arts and fine crafts need to be generated. Tourists to the NWT have a major impact on the sales in this industry. There is a strong demand for locally made products, which authentically represent most regions in some way through the use of local materials, produced by local people, and/or based on traditional skills.

However, price is a major consideration. Through a recent survey, we have found that many visitors and tourists to the NWT wish to purchase products from an area or region that they have just visited, however, price deters them in many cases. Through a recent survey we learned that most tourists are not expecting to or do not budget for spending more than a couple hundred dollars on products or souvenirs during their travels to the NWT and subsequently, are not financially prepared to purchase higher-end art or fine crafts. Consequently, most purchases they make tend to be of low-cost souvenir-type products or smaller items. In some cases, tourists are completely unaware of the types of locally made products available for purchase.

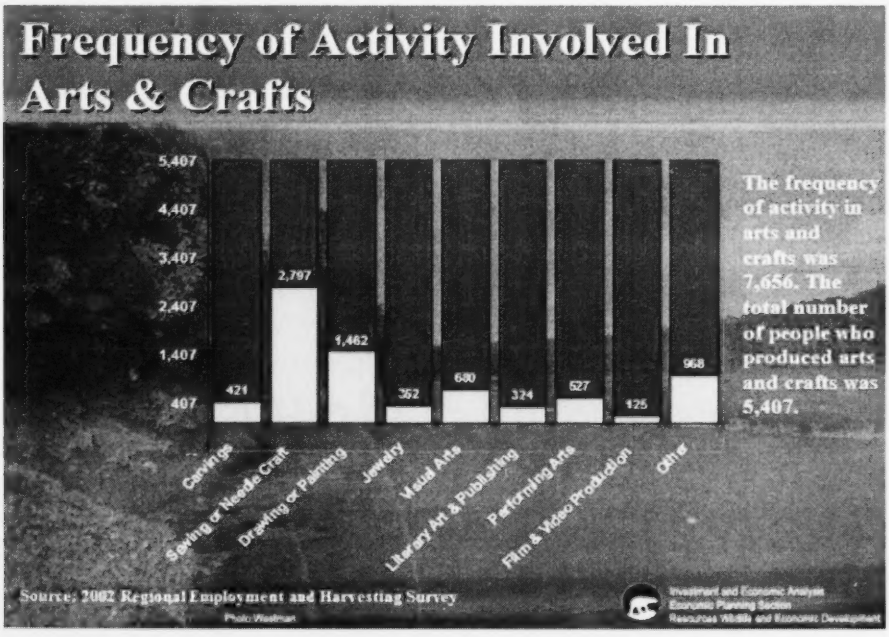
A major obstacle we face with respect to awareness is the lack of distinct imaging of NWT art and fine crafts. Traditional goods produced in the NWT are easily comparable in type to those throughout other Canadian Aboriginal cultures and are not necessarily considered traditional and unique only to the NWT. Therefore, branding or tagging of all NWT art and fine crafts would help bring awareness, recognition and authentication to products produced by NWT Artists.

Product marketing falls into four areas requiring development:

- Increase national and international awareness of NWT products through promotional tools and materials;
- Develop a universal branding tag image;
- Develop a national and international marketing plan, and
- Increase NWT Arts promotion as integral to tourism.

There appears to be an imbalance in effort and resulting success in promoting products from the

Chart 3: Frequency of Activity involved in Arts and Crafts



NWT. Art forms such as soapstone carvings, prints and tapestries appear to have found their market niche in southern Canada and abroad. In contrast, many product categories have not been as well developed and efforts must be directed at matching product lines with market demand. Considerable effort is required in defining unique and identifiable product lines and positioning them in the marketplace. Consequently, distribution channels also need to be developed in various areas and regions in the NWT. Marketing and production planning must go hand in hand.

CONCLUSION

Art and artistic endeavours are important from a social, cultural and economic perspective. The process of expression, creation and production of art celebrates, preserves and transmits culture throughout a life cycle of learning and awareness. This is a valuable benefit that cannot be measured in financial terms.

Although the financial impact is not clear, it is a sector with high participation by NWT residents, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, in all communities.

Success for this industry lies in developing ways of raising awareness for products produced, along with support for existing and emerging programs and services that will sustain a healthy and thriving arts sector in the NWT. Providing this will result in the creation of top quality art and fine crafts which will enhance the growth and economic development of our individual artists and preserve NWT cultural heritage and integrity.

Dene Beadwork and Sewing (RWED, GNWT)